

Focusing In . . . February 2011

“We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.” NIV – Romans 8: 26

A literal Greek translation of the verse above reads, “Similarly, the Spirit is together supporting the un-firmness in us for what we should be praying . . . but the same Spirit is over-pleading over us to groanings un-talked”.

I appreciate the Greek’s clarity – supporting the un-firmness in us for what our words can’t seem to say. That certainly sums up my prayer life. I say a lot of words, but do they truly express the essence of my heart? What is prayer and why do we spend a lot of time telling things to God of which He is well aware? And why might the Divine need my input in order to help or heal my beloved? One frustration is that most Sundays, we experience poor examples of corporate prayer. We get “the list” that tends to become the community announcement time for finding out who is sick in the congregation or if we’re lucky, what is the recent crisis in the country or around the world. Is that prayer?

I know that we are awkward with silence and it is difficult to create a space in corporate worship to listen to the Spirit’s leading. It would be wonderful, however, if somehow we could “groan” together as God’s people and in our vulnerable “un-firmness”, allow God’s Spirit to lead us in discerning what is truly our divine calling as God’s people. On the other hand, perhaps the list IS our feeble groaning and we trust that the Spirit is “over-pleading” the un-talked desires of our hearts and our words simply become the background white noise to It’s utterings.

I spend much of my profession with words though they are such inadequate tools for communication and yet that is the tool we have been given to interpret our lives before God. Even when I sit in silence, words are bouncing around my brain. The verse above gives me some hope that those bouncing, often meaningless thoughts form a basis through which the Spirit can draw me into the presence of Love and eventually Love will overcome my words and I will simply abide.

It isn’t easy to understand prayer but Jesus prayed and so I and we together must pray. We are urged to pray without ceasing – words or no words – whether we feel like it or not. Our breath becomes our prayer for I believe that when we do finally encounter the presence of the ever-living God, we will come to the end of what words or thoughts can usefully do. All that is left will be breath and the Greek word for Spirit is “ruah” – breath. The Spirit breathes into our nostrils and once more we become a living being – created anew into the image of our Creator. In those rare moments, all that which is un-firm becomes firm in the grip of Love. We are at peace and our prayer is answered.

By grace alone,

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